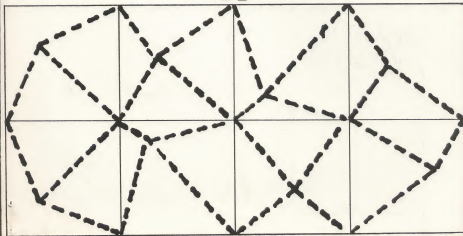


# THE MYSTERIOUS BARRICADES 1.



cover by Andrea Lillenthal

THE MYSTERIOUS BARRICADES

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## HOTEL DE LA GARE, HENDAYE, AUG. 22nd, 1930

I looked through the window of my room, Hotel de la Gare,  
and you were there in front of the toy architecture of the station  
and waited a long time; other poets would have said:

'I could hardly bear it', and forgotten;

I drew the shutters and I still remember.

I looked through the window of my room, Hotel de la Gare,

and you were there on the road to Spain.

I watched you for a long time, then drew the volets (French  
for shutters)

and I cannot forget seeing you from the window.

Have I not always looked through the window of my mind

and drawn the shutters? Drawn them and shut out the light?

Have I not always watched someone who waited on the road to  
Spain?

And turned away and not forgotten?

Through the window of my mind, Hotel de la Gare,

I saw you, walking into Spain;

and quietly I closed the shutters and stayed

in my room till you had gone.

But my soul (poetry for mind) has always looked  
through the window of my eyes, Hotel de la Gare,  
and watched someone walking southward into Spain,  
it was you, or you, on another road from mine,  
and from the window of my mind I watched you,  
my soul looked on through the window of my eyes,  
and I saw you go from the window of my room, Hotel de la Gare;  
and I have closed the shutters and stayed in my room.

## MEDITATION ON A POET'S NOTEBOOK

Not the incongruous but the different,  
 the rich contrast in nature gives us joy:  
 the bright ragwort yellow on the stone wall,  
 the Red Admiral low by the sea shore,  
 fair-haired, the sailor on a motor bike  
 skims like an angel over the green lanes;  
 in the mind, the swift imagination,  
 we set the star upon the fountain's jet,  
 starlight, gold on the soft silver water;  
 the nacreous cloud across the cypress;  
 deftly the boy in the front bench gathers  
 the black cat that has wandered into church  
 (points, mews at the preacher in the pulpit),  
 rich in their difference like rider and horse,  
 pure in the single line of their oneness,  
 the boy and the cat are a shaft of light,  
 of sinuous beauty in the holy place.  
 Clear, serene, intense, alone yet gathered  
 to the world's heart and mirrored in the soul  
 of watching man, until time's end bestowed  
 from the unending treasury of things,  
 these scenes are light and music to the mind,  
 blue flash of kingfisher to shadowed bank,

## ARISTOTELIAN VIEW

Fragile the flesh of flowers resists  
 the heat of sun and whip of storm  
 born of its grain of seed this tough entelechy persists  
 beauty scent strength return once more  
 to make the seed yield to their own their universal form

FIVE FINGER EXERCISE ON LINES FROM JOSÉ  
ASUNCIÓN SILVA

Aveces, cuando en alta noche tranquila,  
sobre las teclas vuela tu mano blanca,  
como una mariposa sobre una lila,  
y al teclado sonoro notas arranca .....

White hand over the keyboard  
white butterfly on the lilac  
the scented lilacs of Warsaw  
the flowering lilacs of Chopin  
moonlight through the window  
and white hands on the lilac  
pale flowers of lilac breaking into sound  
white moonlight shining on the lilac scent  
swift hand outstretched to touch the flowering moon  
a moonwhite hand that plays upon the lilac  
butterfly hand moonlit lilac caressing  
rich scented lilac weighed down with pale mauve bloom  
under the moonlit hand the keyboard bursts with flower  
lilac heavy with flowering brims over into sound

FIVE FINGER EXERCISE ON A LINE FROM TENNYSON

The sun went down, the stars came out  
far over the summer sea

Down into the sea the sun  
sowing the summer sea with gold  
a far wet world of streaming light  
but time and change have not gone down  
a streaming world of far wet light  
the lessening light the far off gold  
are quenched and spent dark is the sea  
the summer sea is vast and dark  
but over it the vast dark sky  
is slowly lit with all the stars  
the stars that see their mirrored lights  
stretched far across the summer sea



## DEATH IS A STAR

Spinning down from a clear silk violet sky  
a green star pierces the front of my head,  
floats through a hole at the back: this is how I die.

With my feet off the ground I collide with  
a cloud, dense, unending, of hyacinth:  
my flesh is soaked deep into its blinding whiteness.

With my lips, the last fragment of me, fast  
on the rich silk of its shining fragrance  
I dissolve, am hyacinth; hyacinth is I.

Death is a star that I long for in a sky of light,  
a star that changes my shape, no, gives me  
my inmost form: my heaven is a white hyacinth.

## SAUDADE

In the blind house of absence cold the air  
and dark the mind, the walls are hung with black;  
choked thought recedes to violet solitude.

Slowly the sharp knife turns and grief begins  
to ooze like the dark blood that drop by drop  
ebbs from the soft bruised tissue of the heart.

Blind house and wounded heart thick their walls are  
hung with pain, dark night floods the aching eyes,  
stifling the violet thought that love is gone.

The mangled thought behind the tear-blind eyes  
creeps from the house of absence dark with grief:  
the violet sky spreads to the world's rim and no star shines.

Sisyphus my brother my friend  
 as you roll your stone without end  
 I forget your crimes (which are mine)  
 see only the pain of divine  
 vengeance carved in your sweating face  
 the daily grief of all our race  
 As I put my hands on the stone  
 strain my guts with yours in a groan  
 of despair it is not your rock  
 I push but a heavy wood block  
 and Sisyphus is Chrestos - weep  
 because he too must climb the steep  
 hill for ever brother and friend  
 our crimes go on without end

#### LAMENT

Theocritean women mourn:  
 no gods to make the meadows sweet,  
 no fauns to haunt the shadowed woods,  
 no king to die defending life;  
 the poets gone, the pipers fled;  
 rusted the sacrificial knife.  
 Can we bring back the gods to bless?  
 Shall we again see fauns to dance  
 under the whispering trees our joy?  
 Anointed king, singer bay-crowned,  
 makers of music, all are dead,  
 In the deep sea of time all drowned.

## THE CASTLE IN THE AIR

Across the river deep and grey  
rise the white battlemented towers  
and roofs like delicate stone flowers  
- flowers that on hedgerows shine in May.

Raised above tree and dewy lawn  
upon its hill the castle there  
floats on the soft pearl-tinted air,  
new-built its strength in a new dawn.

A heavenly city free from sin  
it keeps great treasure in its halls.  
... Now from the bank a boatman calls  
and trumpets sound to let us in.

## A DREAM OF THE GRAIL

So pilgrims to the castle bright  
come to its inmost splendours where  
suspended in the golden air  
a great cup shines made all of light

and feeds them in an endless stream  
each in his solitude drawn near,  
hungry and sick, pursued by fear,  
seeking a beauty seen in dream

that has no name to tease the mind:  
only a radiance in the heart  
drives them to seek its counterpart  
that, feeding, makes them one mankind.

## MATTINS FOR A COOL MORNING

The sweet cathedral matten bell  
 calls out the crocuses as well  
 as month by month and spring by spring  
 our flowers and chimes together ring  
 rung in rung out with peace with strife  
 a night a month a year a life  
 night went and snowdrops with the snow  
 Mary how does your garden grow  
 oh thick with primrose violet  
 narcissus and with bells that yet  
 repetitive the air must fill  
 as soon the silly cuckoo will  
 beyond the garden's tall hedgerow  
 lies farmer's field and his slow plow  
 measures its furrows wet and black  
 where rich the golden wheat will stack  
 after this feast of light and flowers  
 that makes our rustic book of hours  
 as listening to the bell end slow  
 we to our breakfast now will go  
 the ear cannot resist the spell  
 of the cool morning matten bell

## VESPERS FOR A HOT AFTERNOON

Pomegranates on their trees  
 beneath them lovers take their ease  
 as the sun moves down the sky  
 cast their shadows lovers sigh  
 till the silent heat in waves  
 laps about them slowly saves  
 for after tea the rich long  
 retrospective thoughts ding dong  
 that only indolent warm hours  
 bring to bloom like white wax flowers  
 lovers oh what then to do  
 thought's no food for hearts that woo  
 hearts have strings with brains attached  
 after kisses mind's unlatched  
 dear dummies in your paradise  
 the serpent and his false advice  
 soon it's after tea and thought  
 in its confusing web has caught  
 brains and hearts together now  
 must kisses stop brains think but how  
 underneath the darkening trees  
 golden pomegranates take their ease

## THE LEDGER

the  
ledger

itself

the ledger survived

because it was neither  
human nor useful

- a. "in bookkeeping, the book of final entry, in which a record of debits, credits, and all money transactions is kept."

the  
book  
of columns

page 33: James Darling

1880

Mar 22: to sewing square timber	1.44		
June 21: to 1 round cedar bed	3.50		
June 21: to 1 jack shingles	.50		
Dec. 4: to sawing mable [sic]	1.50	Nov 4/82 by logs	4.10

(it doesn't balance)

some pages torn out (by accident)  
some pages remaining (by accident)

page 62: Nicholas Neubecker

1893

Nov. 16: to chopping 8 bags	.40
Dec. 19: to chopping 880 lbs	.49
: to elm scantling	.18

the poet: by accident  
finding in the torn ledger

(IT DOESN'T BALANCE)

the green poem:

my grandfather, Henry (dead)  
in his water mill (gone)  
on the Teeswater River,  
on the road between Formosa and  
Belmore, needing a new ledger:

the ledger itself (surviving)  
purchased in the Bruce  
County Drug and Book  
(Price: \$1.00 PAID),  
the leather cover brown.

In gold: The Ledger:EVERYTHING I WRITE  
I SAID, IS A SEARCH  
(is debit, is ~~credit~~ <sup>debit</sup>)

is a search

for some pages

remaining

(by accident)

the poet: finding  
in the torn ledgerthe column straight  
the column broken

## FINDING

everything you write  
my wife, my daughters, said  
is a search for the deadthe book of final entry  
in which a record is kept.

- b. "a horizontal piece of timber secured to the uprights  
supporting the putlogs in a scaffolding, or the like."

The Canada Gazette, August 17, 1854:

"Notice is hereby given that the  
undermentioned lands..., in the  
County of Bruce, U.C. will be open  
for sale to actual settlers...  
The price to be Ten shillings per  
acre... Actual occupation to be  
immediate and continuous..."

To raise a barn;

cut down a forest.

To raise oats and hay;

burn the soil.

To raise cattle and hogs;

kill the bear  
kill the mink  
kill the marten

"As to the climate of the dis-  
trict, Father Holzer cannot  
praise it enough. He de-

kill the lynx  
kill the fisher  
kill the beaver  
kill the moose

clares that during the first  
nine months of his residence  
here they had only one funeral,  
and that was of a man  
84 years old."

A PRISTINE FOREST  
A PRISTINE  
FOREST

"That winter, therefore, timbers of elm and maple and pine  
were cut the necessary lengths, hewed and dressed and hauled  
by means of the oxen to the barn site. Cedar logs were sawn  
in suitable lengths and shingles split from these blocks..."

"To the Saugeen!"  
was the cry that spread.

Shaping the trees  
into logs (burn  
the slash) into  
timbers and planks.

Henry, the elder of the two  
brothers, was born in 1856,  
across the river from the  
mill in a log shanty measuring  
(as specified in The Canada  
Gazette, August 17, 1854) at  
least sixteen feet by eighteen.

Shaping the trees  
into ledgers.  
Raising the barn.

That they might sit down  
a forest had fallen.

to a pitcher of Formosa beer

Shaping the trees.  
Into shingles.  
Into scantling.  
Into tables and chairs.

Have a seat, John.  
Sit down, Henry.

That they might sit down  
a forest/had fallen.

page 119: John O. Miller, brickmaker in Mildmay

1888

Aug. 17: to cedar shingles 12.50 Aug. 17: by brick 2500  
at .50 12.50

(I'll be damned. It balances.)

yes: no  
no: yes

"... a specimen of the self-made men who have made Canada what it is, and of which no section has brought forth more or better representatives than the County of Bruce. Mr. Miller was never an office-seeker, but devoted himself strictly and energetically to the pursuit of his private business, and on his death was the owner of a very large and valuable property...."

Shaping the trees.  
Pushing up daisies.

Have another glass, John.  
Ja, ja. What the hell.

What's the matter, John?  
My bones ache.

Take a day off, John.  
No time.

A horizontal piece of timber  
supporting the pullogs  
in a scaffolding, or the like.

(specimens of the self-made  
men who have made Canada  
what it is)

The barn is still standing  
(the mill, however, is gone)  
sound as the day it was raised.

No time.  
August 17, 1888.

No time.

Shaping the trees.  
Pushing up daisies.

I'll be damned.  
It balances.



AT THE GATE: his own voice

from: THE LIFE OF JESUS

It was time to go, and I, having packed my things, walked on the path that led downhill from the house. I was leaving; Hound was going before me. He'd romp ahead, bite on a stone, wiggle, and throw it into the air; and then he would stop, looking back at me, to see that I was following.

We'd eaten dinner -my father had come home early this day- in the late afternoon. My mother had put up a small bundle for me, of food; my father had tied it, onto a stick. I carried the stick, with the bundle hanging and swaying, over my shoulder. I'd kick at a stone, and Hound would run to fetch it; his cape moved from the motion, slightly, over his haunches. There was no real wind.

Eating, we didn't talk much. My father said a few things, about what he'd done that day, but the words seemed to stick in our throats. My father had talked things over with me, a few days previous, out in the shed at the back of the house. My mother had little to say about my leaving; she knew it was time to happen; I think she knew she'd see me again, and often.

And as I was going, slowly, kicking at stones, I turned back, and saw them. They were standing together, close, at the gate, in the first hint of the falling light. I was two hundred yards away. Standing together, their arms at their sides, I could see my father's hand begin to move.

I don't want to go, I said to myself; and then I said it out loud: "I don't want to go."

And suddenly, I was back in the house again, standing before the window, looking at them from the back. They were both naked, though I could see the edge of the clothing that covered the front of their bodies. My father's buttocks were heavy, but his hips were narrow; my mother had a slim waist; her spine stood out, like rope down the middle of her back. My father's heels were calloused; his arm had moved half way around my mother's body; it was not touching her, but it looked to be heading for her shoulder. I felt Hound's nose nuzzle into my palm. Then came the lines, like a sharp aura, that began to appear around their bodies; my mother's green robes came into focus; my father became covered in brown fabric. I kicked the wall below the window: I must leave, I said to myself; and immediately, the wall turned to a stone: skittering along the ground; Hound was chasing it, I was out on the path again.

This time, as I looked back, their bodies were naked in front, and I knew I should not look at them. But I could not turn away; my mother had taken a posture, half-way tilted at the neck, her head close to my father's shoulder; her arm too had moved, forward, and up to the level of her waist. They stood at the gate; my father's belly was hard and firm, my mother's was soft. I could see dark places, like hair, in their crotches; my mother's breasts were small. And then the clothes began again; they seemed to be formed in the way a child might fill in a figure in a coloring book, after he'd strongly outlined the form.

How can I leave them like this, I thought, there at the gate, touching each other; what will they do, in the evenings, without me. My cape hung loose over one shoulder. Hound whimpered and nipped at my heels, hoping I'd throw him a stone to fetch. My bundle bobbed at the end of my stick. They stood at the gate, watching.

And then I was moving, backwards, slowly; and Hound was moving too. And I could see, over my shoulder, to where they were standing, their clothes beginning to dissolve again from their bodies, I started to call forth fence posts out of my mouth; I called forth stanchions and rooted trees; but when I grabbed for them, in order to hold myself back, they seemed, always, to be out of reach, and I could only brush them with my hands, and pass them. I was getting closer; Hound floated beside me; their clothes were melting away. And then I tried calling out an entire fence to block my way; but instead of the fence, the door of the house flew open; my father's heavy chair moved through it, floating in the air, coming to meet me. And when it reached me, it hit me behind the knees. And then I sat in the chair, Hound held tight in my arms, and kept drifting back, towards them.

They stood at the gate - beside it; and the gate was open, and as I passed them, the clothes on the front of their bodies began to form again, and the back of their bodies became naked again, as I passed them. The chair entered the open door of the house, and it came to rest, gently, back in front of the window again.

It was then I wept, and asked my father to help me. The hand of the father who stood at the gate was hovering over my mother's shoulder. My mother's head was almost touching the father's body. Her own arm was completely extended now, before her; the palm had turned toward her own face.

I wept, knowing I had to go; Hound stood waiting beside me. I called out to my real father: "help me," I said.

And then I was back on the path again; and then I was kicking at stones, and Hound was chasing them, throwing them into the air, scampering back and forth. And when I reached a place where the path turned, I looked back at the house again.

They were standing together; my father's hand on my mother's shoulder, hugging her to him; my mother's head, pressed into my father's neck; she had covered her mouth with her hand.

This is the image fixed in my memory, as I am going away. And it stays with me, and comes as a light, in my mind, often: my mother, my father, watching me go away. They stand in the falling light, close together, at the gate.

## SUNLIGHT SERENADE

"for" Jackson Mac Low

As much sunlight as you can imagine  
showers in, only to increase my sense of loss  
and disarmament. Fierce and insistent light

of your own conviction; it is crude and blundering  
in its graciousness and drowns me in a well

of indignity, almost blind with foreign tears.  
Unable to sleep: heartless and selfish, more  
likely, awkward and improper? Loss or gain

discomfort remains the same: needing that edge  
which the shower diminishes and without which sleep

seems frightening.                      Feeling awkward and improper  
by virtue of a generosity no one asks to match seems

unduly cruel, and unable to sleep on the edge of our bed  
looking out the window for some new advantage.  
But it is dark and nothing has changed.

The evening should settle us  
as the corners of an arc, during definition,  
diminishing to a comfortable curve

any child can ~~draw~~ without the slightest instruction.  
But I bargain against this, the most natural of

tendencies and go sleepless fighting a losing battle  
against comfort for an edge already lost, taken  
by the shower of your light: its absolute

faith and incessant focus,  
the charred remains what's left me.

## EVAPORATED DREAMS

There was a long story about a long drive in a long country on the tip of my tongue and I wanted to tell it and toast a merger to everyone's benefit. It was

sleepy and people slept. But a burning cross neatly consumes itself without a moment's notice, and the words lined up naturally, themselves conscious of a textual capability and the order in which each would do itself and its fellows justice. Their rules, ruled. My speech "went out of control," the sentences rushing to finish with some urgency other than my own and leaving out, what seemed to me, to be their most important subjects. With the fat cut away, almost immediately, close to nothing was left; nothing recognizable at least. A problem of identification in transferring a check or someone's complaint of a slight itch and turning to them, finding the Atlantic in their place. One thinks of Descartes, laboring well into the night and watching his candle transform itself and then practically disappear. The fraud of things and potential for infinite division left him insomniac:

his arithmetic and sanity at stake, not knowing how to count or tell time any longer and convinced there was an answer because there was a question and there he was asking it: his arithmetic and sanity at stake.

There was a long story about a long drive in a long country on the tip of my tongue and it sat there on a kind of horizon I advanced towards, hoping to reduce its threat to an easily forgotten joke or informative memoir. But the day ruled it out and left a few awkward incidents, like this time or that: occasions for which there is little to say and neither can be confirmed nor denied.

## FROM THE PERIPHERY: AN OPEN LETTER TO N.Y.

## SCHOOL POETS

There is an astonishing revelation for "us" at a moment in Valéry's Monsieur Teste; it arrives in the "Letter from Mme. Teste."

Then I told Father Masson that my husband often reminded me of a mystic without God...

"What a flash!" said Father, "What flashes of truth women sometimes derive from the simplicity of their impressions and the uncertainty of their language!..."

But at once, and to himself, he replied:

"A mystic without God! Luminous nonsense!... It's easily said... False light.... A mystic without God, madame, why no movement is conceivable without direction and sense, without finally going somewhere! A mystic without God!... Why not a Hippogriff, or a centaur!"

"Why not a Sphinx, Father?"

And this is how it is for "us" too. Our poems do not necessarily work themselves out in their revelation in the manner with which reality wracks us. The Father is "interested" in truth, which is precisely what is lacking in "our" poetry. I think this is based in the ultimate despair of Truth; we are led to a graceful verse harbored in the beauty of connections which might not exist at all, and we leave it at that, postulating the possible, in an uncertain language, amused with the imagination.

One might say, "This is the only thing to be expected!" I am not lamenting a lost poetry founded in singing only what is sung: impossible to be other than it is; but I <sup>54</sup> ~~see~~ <sup>43</sup> ~~am~~ the above a warning to us against a wholly contingent and completely variable verse. I see that "we" are possible "in the circumstance of water" and perhaps "we" are not swimming.

"Y<sup>65</sup><sub>est</sub>" said M. Teste, "that is not to confuse words. we must realize that we can arrange them as we will, and that for every combination we make, there does not necessarily exist some other corresponding thing."

Perhaps, as Heidegger suggests, the poet's business is to call forth reality, revealing what it is. I see in "our" work something different: the word establishing what it wants to correspond with. "We" simply let it whatever and <sup>64</sup> ~~assume~~ that reality expands an integer. Or I suspect that this is what is assumed. Reality doesn't budge.

I don't think saying something like "poetry is tomatoes" is worth the price of those tomatoes; it might as well be apricots or suspension bridges or breakfast tea; it might as well

be anything. It is some other reality; why confuse it with breakfast tea or a salad when no such bridge can be made?

I think poems are being written today that might be completed, say after the first line, by a poet other than the one who began the piece, and that it wouldn't make any difference. Slight perversions become institutionalized into forms and occupational procedures. This is not disastrous; the poems glide by, weightless, possibly well composed things, urging nothing, for how can one trust in them if they are, more or less, "luminous nonsense," which is, in itself a perfect example.

NYC Jan. 1970

tales of my childhood  
apple-path behind the carpathians my blind  
and smelly grandmother  
or that my wife wouldn't let me  
her cold hips slippery beside me  
or like the wind, as Creeley says  
would never stop blowing  
or that the pink sprays on the brown ridge--  
it was a cold day in the carpathians  
it was a cold bell that rang in Brooklyn  
it was the leaves in the wash of the train  
braced like a seabird  
the blue light above snow-line



## ELEGY

broken pigeon wings,  
& pepper            the morning meal,  
   in the afternoon  
the tire is as a grid  
across its wing            searched for so long  
every small thing appears  
in pain as I turn towards it,  
sweating at breakfast,  
                                 at night to tell it out  
the many small calls  
for one direction  
  
the little pieces aching  
for feet, for one road,  
                                 I would say they were all  
a part of it,  
if I knew...

                                 and yet there come so many  
to be tossed into view,  
crossing over one another  
in the clear heat of day

Alluding  
as if each slice  
was of the body  
aching to be back to it,  
again  
as if it could come together in the mouth  
& be blown out straight again  
as if one could push toward it  
with a shape one has made,  
like a car...

they gather  
toward a cold peak,  
a mountain seen as the shape,  
my body another  
                                 (the valley in between,  
                                 where we are lost forever,  
                                 for a second)...

or the mountain is a lake,  
a cup of coffee,  
the blood in the wingmeat of the angels  
or the bird  
dead yet beating in the heart  
in a chamber of the solitary tower

## WHITE BEADS

1.

The white beads  
 worrying,  
     turning  
 the directions of change      fingers  
 discern a golden chain.  
 the feel of pearl      digging at the ore  
 feel what is small,      real  
     real  
 and that it does move,  
 starting  
     at the  
         core--  
             the white beads  
 a scaled procession.  
 here and now making the knees bend,  
 the head hangs,  
     the eyes-  
         on the progression of beads

2.

The aura- of opium,  
 or myrrh,  
     The door opens for them  
 on a table in the darkness-      a globe of radiance.  
     god, that's right where they stood,  
 heads hung,  
     the white beads in their hands

3.

bright small bones  
 the coins of life,  
 toil  
 & wonderment  
 trodding on the chain  
 toward the things  
 that might be loved,  
 the feet that love each diamond  
 toes flexing in cold water

bright small bones  
                                 mouth mother,  
 mother of pearl,  
                                 pearl mother,  
 white beads

the small bones of the feet  
 feeling each one, and  
 how it is fed by the wind

then I see each one  
 within a small circle of radiance-  
 bright small bones

plunging slowly toward them,  
 a boat toward that point of brightness-  
 entering,  
 slowly,

staying /

a lid of the weariness  
 opens slowly  
 brushes each wave

and the shore is scraped,  
                                 white beads

we know that  
 we had stayed long  
 but felt primarily  
 felt mostly  
 what we are feeling now:  
 that they are bright  
 and chained together  
 and almost unbearably  
 new.

## THE MAN WHO HAD SWALLOWED THE WORLD

His voice rumbled in his throat  
as if animals slept there.  
When he sang, all the animals of the world  
listened to the voices within them singing,  
listened to their swallowed worlds singing  
of the music they had swallowed,  
and of the music's children.

---

watching the black mollusk,  
the evil affliction  
grow  
a silver muscle waiting  
while black shells surround it with its growth  
yet the star living  
at the center of the brittle cabbage  
still thinks in terms of light  
still dreams of constellations  
and of illuminating presences descending from the sky  
as the black shells slowly grow  
as a black presence slowly rises  
and occupies  
what is left to occupy.

## DRAWING OF THE TREES

By the light of one candle, your drawing of the trees becomes  
a forest where we can enter within the frame,  
Hansel-and-Gretel-like take a path  
just beyond my vision, round the huge grey boles.  
Maybe you drew/yourself onto the same path, deep,  
to the hut of the dead. I try to see the doors of a forest  
opened, though July hadn't opened, though your spring  
of days was swinging shut - and you watching a darkness within,  
framing your life. Did you see invisible animals there?  
the ones that nuzzle sleeping children, tenderly  
as you moved colors in your hand.  
Is drawing that way praying  
to a drowsy god?

something

too fairytale, beautiful,  
dying at nineteen.  
On the hospital bed your eyes clouded as if  
some stranger was demanding a forfeit  
for an injury you could not understand.  
Drawing those trees you left, darkening,  
a landscape; you didn't know the intruder's face.  
Left a picture, world that's left, and somewhere  
within it, death.

## PAIN OF IMAGES

## 1.

rain and the sudden light,  
 colors, visions of women  
 and red angels riding.

rhymes and treason:  
 green eyes, gold horizon.

blue ring of smoke, perimeter  
 of dreams, Grey cat in the attic, drunk,  
 howling for every separation, miserable knowledge  
 that drives back like sand in a man's eyes.  
 Amazing rainbow of hatred  
 sways like a derelict father. Money  
 greener than old Earth itself,  
 golden with sun's gold, and the cat's  
 staggering, crippled with sleep and wisdom;  
 his pursuit of angels is lechery, his prayer  
 a careless mockery. So he's jealousy,  
 bitter guardian. No.  
 Healer of the heart's poison? No.  
 A kiss - No. This  
 poem: oranges on the bough.

green eyes, gold horizon.

## 2.

pain of images  
 pain of birth  
 pain of groundswelling fishes and a river  
 pain of a friend who holds his face, fingertips  
 folded in the creases, and ~~leaves~~;  
 pain of the animal cinched in steel, of his neck and skin  
 pain of empty houses  
 pain of colors  
 pain of having a thousand names: pain pain pain.  
 pain, pain of pain. A thief comes knocking,  
 hunching, he asks only to be let in,  
 to lock the door against police and pain.  
 Thief! I scream Thief, and slam his fingers,  
 and I am a hammer, and my house  
 an anvil of pain. I will not help him again.

pain of images, pain of colors  
 friend who nurses his eyes in the dark  
 watching red angels and murderers everywhere.

## JIMMY AND COMPANY

Any form worthy of survival is a form that can be exploited: i.e., handled, stretched, mishandled, its boundaries tested and shifted. Form in itself is the illusion of fixity given to that which is mutable and plastic; the encounters of practice with eventuality. In time, if permitted, practice will outweigh eventuality, its very thickness creating its own supplement to experience. At such times, form congeals; and at such times an act of defiance and sacrilege is indicated.

James Swinerton, whose career breasted that of American comic strip art, offers a kind of one-man instruction course in boundaries, and how much mobility they can be permitted while continuing to maintain themselves as boundaries. His Little Bears (California cubs which later, in deference to New York City's political climate when he moved East, became Little Tigers) was a single-panel cartoon feature, peopled with the toy-like little animals in various settings and pantomimes. From there to the block format (two panels on two panels on two panels) of his New York Journal and Journal of American years; from the nursery-like charades of the bears and tigers to the miniature lecheries of Mr. Jack to the gravely humorous, all-encompassing childhood of perhaps his most famous drawing, Little Jimmy (done eventually in the across-the-page "strip" format which he helped evolve); throughout this little chronicle of cartoon history and technique, Swinerton holds to the frames and ceremonies of illustration; and, through this holding of outposts, he retains, Swinerton, a hypnotic fluidity of space within the odd, heatless sunlight which pervades his drawings; an insidious fluency, which infiltrates not only compositions, but characters and situations.

Although the half-century and some-odd-years' career brought its own simplifications, corner-cuttings, Swinerton's drawing at its most memorable, for me, presents a face of almost doll-like blankness to the world. Large-headed little animals (their minikin bodies sporting either costumes or contemporary styles); large-headed little children, whose faintly mask-like faces, with their double-circle eyes, increase the haunting uncertainty as to their actual age. These kids, like the tigers and bears, have tiny noses and bird-bill mouths; mouths which regularly, however, fan out in smiles of surprising virtuosity for such simple-looking arcs: they can be apologetic, or amiable, or--often--of a lunatic self-complacency. In conversation, the people lean towards each other as though their heads were magnetized. Some of Swinerton's most amusing panels result from these children running about on their stumpy little legs, like turtles dancing. And throughout Swinerton's career--possibly his most notable and enduring trait--all personae speak with quote-marks enclosing their dialogue: the emblem of Swinerton's shy, comic decorum.

The last thing one should expect of this kewpie-like repertory, this gently archaic style, ought to be an almost total lack of sentimental coyness; and this is what Swinnerton continually achieves. Genteel and courtly and sedately middlebrow he also, continually, is; but, withal, he, James Swinnerton, is totally immersed in his creation; meaning that the gentleness and gentility and formalism are all Swinnerton's earnestness of his own presence in his work; meaning that this embodies last-ditch resistance to that waste and shrivelling, that emotional mold, which we usually call sentimentality, or cuteness. Little Jimmy is full of sweetness and good manners, but it is also full of orneriness, demandingness, people who yank and wrench at their betters' brute endurance, let alone patience, like a salesman demonstrating latex underpants. And Little Jimmy, with all its just-short-of-prissy quietness, is a signal achievement, I think: a comic strip supposedly centered on a little boy--more contemplative than Skippy, less chillingly ambiguous than Orphan Annie--through whom we see trafficking an adult world of willfulness, boorishness, lechery and tiny violences.

Throughout the various configurations of his panels, Swinnerton deploys almost-empty space as austerely and suggestively as, say, the earlier sculpture of Robert Morris. He evolved throughout his career a horizontal, mural-like composition, in which the background--California desert or small-town street--runs flat as a tape behind the figures; and the figures themselves seem etched as much as drawn, in a methodical, all-but-shadowless line, whose main function often seems to be to emphasize the space between the characters, and between the characters and settings. A fierce balance of patience and anxiety seems to prevail in Swinnerton's drawing; I constantly receive an image of him musing over every line, like the chessplayer over his next move. Each panel, true to illustrative principles, catches an action at its central point, in suspension, rather than the process of action. Practically no speed images--whizzing lines, etc.--nor illusory effects; every action sequence is centered in the placement and attitudes of the figures.

The effect of such etching-like impaction is a series of minute episodes which are almost over as soon as they begin; and which typify the somewhat stiff-kneed dance rhythm which permeates the whole of Swinnerton's work. One receives from such work, not the interlocking actions of Moon Mullins; but a procession of tableaux, whose participants appear time after time in the same eye-level, frieze-like arrangement; sometimes several of them struggling out through one ribbon-like panel. This stretching of time and space, day after day, leads one to wonder how much can happen, when such limited space is so attenuated. And, indeed, the flickers of action which occur, like little camp fires spotted down a canyon, are definitely of secondary interest; the main concern being the odd, seeming-lethargic rhythm which Swinnerton sustains, with its lizard-like movements of covert alertness.



Throughout his life as a cartoonist, Swinnerton seems to have gripped jealously the conditions of his freedom in the earlier years of the Examiner and the American and the Journal; those years in which the drawings of Swinnerton or T.E. Powers or McGurk or Tad Dorgan were still treated as accompaniment or ornamentation to the newsprint terrain which bounded them. It was, I think, this very second-class existence which may have guaranteed the artistic freedom of the comic strips and panels of those decades, from the 1890's through the middle twenties. It was precisely being regarded as a mere illustration, gloss or doodle, which, I would propose, liberated the American cartoon--not merely the editorial cartoon, but the since-progressively-diluted comic--by safeguarding it against form. Swinnerton's own illustrative techniques represent not a form but a means of location, of constantly orienting himself for the maximum freedom of space and of imagination. And so did Swinnerton's contemporaries--T.E. Powers, with his skittish stick-figures, Dorgan's smirking political terriers, McGurk with his mock-elegant satirical sketches--made free with the whole terrain of informal observation which their classless class afforded them; not to mention the terrain of paper, the undictated visual surface which was still available to them. This is not at all to suggest that they weren't as bound by deadlines and page-space, by demands for regimented production, as much as are their successors. But, looking at their work today, from among the withered pods of so much dessicated comic art, I can feel an imaginative rapport with the world at large, which--apart from the obvious advantage of permitting occasional social-political comment (which, however, then as now, only the most daring used to much advantage)--allowed the artist to rally his own anxieties and cranks and obsessions and appetites, impressing them into a daily or weekly idiom; at best, more teasingly evocative than out-and-out funny.

Reading Little Jimmy or Mr. Jack, you can re-encounter that primary communion of hand and pen and paper which injected a child's apprehension of art into the beefy sports and politics of the old dailies. I have no precise idea of how far his influence may have reached; but, in a variety of correspondences and echoes, I think I can detect his close rapport with men like Frank King (Gasoline Alley), or J.R. Williams (Out Our Way); or, in its sedate seriousness, Crockett Johnson's popular 40's strip, Barnaby: in all of them, diverse as their voices are, the southwestern or midwestern sense of frontier space, merging with the imaginative limbo of sheer blank paper.

In Swinnerton's comic strips, people are constantly making advances which seem to be rejected more often than accepted; and resorting to little ceremonies, rituals and protocols, which are repeatedly capsized by some gnarl of human waywardness. One of Jimmy's adventures out west (a landscape to which the strip returns, eventually permanently, as did its author) involves

the harassments of an Indian medicine man, a healer who cures the ~~hornet~~-stings of a bear, only to be importuned by the bear to relieve his mate's cold. The hornets reappear to rescue the beleaguered shaman; but this time, demand that in repayment he cure the grandfather hornet's rheumatism. As we last see him, he is appealing to the earth spirits, whose emissary, a prairie dog, is explaining to him, in turn, that the hornets are not their domain; now, if they were mud wasps...

In another episode Jimmy meets a little Scottish boy, whose explanation of his kilts ("These are nae skurruts...") seems totally implausible, and results in a scuffle, which Jimmy wins. In the next day's return match, however, the Scottish boy triumphs; and Jimmy admits that the kilts would probably answer, if buttons were sewn on them and the legs divided. The young Scot buys him an ice cream on this handsome concession.

The enchanting clarity of such episodes comes from the clarity of Swinnerton's own commitment to them. Like the greatest of children's artists, Sendak or Krauss, he does not compromise his eye with either optimistic gookiness or cynicism. Everyone who can, or will, read these simple, though faintly mysterious characters, can get Swinnerton's message; that people or animals do return to their habitual natures, good or evil; that in so doing they run counter to many dictates of propriety or considerateness; that some such occurrences are not to be avoided; and that we should chiefly look forward to mending fences, wherever enough lumber is left us.

Yet, Little Jimmy is by no means entirely a child's comic strip, except to the important extent that a child's directness and diffidence and anxieties are central to Swinnerton's art. Here again, he practices his art without bending it uniformly to the tone of any medium or the prescriptions of a form. Nor is he one bit concerned, as is Charles (Peanuts) Schultz, or Mel (Miss Peach) Lazarus, with creating a coy little pavilion world of "childhood" which is as precious and as adult-directed as anything out of the Victorian era. He was invested, Swinnerton, in relating his fable-like stories through the childhood-molded vision of a fairly complex and vulnerable adult.

So we have him from Little Jimmy's opposite number: Mr. Jack, a possible, more upper-class, grandsire of R. Crumb's Fritz the Cat: a pint-sized rouse in silk hat and frock coat, flourishing a ubiquitous walking stick. Mr. Jack is a little tiger, as are the girls he squires, their fathers, and his circle of head-walters, policemen, butlers and sporting fellow-bachelors; and each diminutive adventure is like a spray of New York City's swank, raunchy, tenderloin atmosphere, in the early days of the century. The typical refrain of Mr. Jack's adventures is paying court; usually to some lovely tiger-girl, occasionally to some bootleg heech. The portrayal of his escapades is more concentrated, linear and strictly pantomimed than Little Jimmy; but with some wonderfully funny riffs of sheer design and

timing (one essentially--and typically--weak gag is rehormonized by a feline beauty, swaddled in furs, whose single visible eye keeps shifting position.) But their common current is that same strange interplay of shy decorum, all-but-mute sardonic humor, and unexpected flurries of sheer wildness, which gives Little Jimmy its constant purr of fascination: that endless suspension between the rigors of illustrative convention and the protean wildness of line.

Little Jimmy, especially in the twenties and thirties, is full of animals; who, while not the complete ensemble as in Mr. Jack, are important featured performers. They are the strip's pantomimists, its Id-figures: Jimmy's burly, Edgar Buchanan-ish bulldog, Beans; his little friend Pinky's rooster; a Californian bear cub, Less inhibited even than the children, these animals enact the potential wildness of line which Swinnerton sparingly allows himself, subverting his own formalities. One notable character, during January of 1917, was a handsome Siamese cat, owned by one of the boys, which would get high on catnip. During such trips, it would commit such unfeline outrages as stealing the uniform off an organ-grinder's monkey; or else, stroke its long, curling whiskers with the characteristic Swinnerton smirk at zenith.

Little Jimmy gives us, I suspect, James Swinnerton's most amusing and beguiling evolution of that hesitant, quirky harassed rhythm which he was developing throughout his and Jimmy's and the American comic strips' careers: that rhythm which is the true content of Swinnerton's work, and the work of his best contemporaries and successors. Little Jimmy is often a series of interruptions, postponements, distractions, the tilting of formality. In one series of episodes, Jimmy's cousin, Cora (as good a looker as Swinnerton's little tiger-girls, and through almost equally economic means) is being visited by a series of beaux, who send Jimmy on a variety of errands, from which Jimmy is repeatedly diverted; once, an old codger conscripts Jimmy--and, eventually, the boy friend--to help him out with his daily crossword puzzle; at another time, a dog fight lures Jimmy, and he comes back with a pocket handkerchief instead of the sheet music requested.

The strip was far more text-laden than Mr. Jack; but the words themselves ran a sort of interference; dropping like a scrim curtain between the reader and what is going on. People--boys, mostly,--untiringly comment on or interpret the action which we see; giving that action itself, simple as it is, a magical effect of suspension and of focus.

Little Jimmy is, at last, almost like an exquisite of every American comic strip; from the great, blank, ever-accommodating southwest desert in which the cast eventually made its permanent home, that desert which was the frontier of art; to the theme of interruption, postponement, endless delay: the theme of childhood's fantasies and its frustrations, with which Swinner-

ton made his gently restless peace, And this ever-interrupted, ever-suspended rhythm, more than gags or excitement, is the content, the sustenance, of comic strips, of which James Swinerton was the constant frontiersman; using the inherited furniture of illustrative art to set the outposts of his own space.

"STEEL IN THE FINGERS WRITES THIS LINE"

Steel in the fingers writes this line,  
What can be done, must be done,  
and with steel.

Somewhere, someone is ringing a bell,  
but is it where another  
waits for the sound?

The line is written,  
flung across these chasms.

The buzzer urges, sightless  
at a twisted gate.

A TRANSITION

I remember great trucks  
rising out of the fog  
like beasts of the deep.

After that, I remember you,  
and a bed and circles of light  
suddenly turned cool.

I remember wading ashore  
after the boat capsized  
with birds fixed firm  
in the air  
over my shoulder.

All of that is dissolving now;  
the being afraid, making love,  
the I that was before the key changed.  
Then it was all adventure,  
not yet desperate.

## ELLIS ISLAND

Hard by the bridge

Crane wrote about

the fortress island

Dourly decked

with empty red brick buildings

Looms

between the harbor

and the Liberty

He carried always in his vision.

Here

After the escape

from border patrols, tricked

By innkeepers and moneylenders

Bilged

for weeks and months in the vinegar-odored steerage

Each inneculated

Jew, Irish, Finn, Greek, Pole, Italian

Made his notarized

passage to a new world without war

Or famine.

Most to the cities

And construction camps, where they traded

The recurring terror of the seasons

For the certitude

of an hourly wage; their women, skilled

At the household loom,

became integers to be reckoned

With the cost of light

Machinery; even the children wore

the workingman's blouse.

Others

Perhaps luckier,

found acreage near waterways

Not unlike the vistulas and rhines

of the Old Country,

Devoting

The husbandry of centuries to the harvest

of a single crop.  
Farmer, grocer, dray-  
man,

He elegized

the peasant rituals, worked All-Souls Day

And a half-day Easter,

And saw his life

As intercession

for children and grandchildren, a native

Generation.

My own family

Came out of the lumber forests

of Hungary and Poland. Pregnant

Aunt Esther

bitt her tongue and kept quiet

Under a load of hay

when the border guard's

Pitchfork pierced her thigh,

Uncle Strool,

Who died an American millionaire,

worked by day

At a garment machine; at night

As a baker's helper

and slept when he could

on a park bench.

But no one

Had that soft romantic dream

Like my father,

Half pitchman, half melamud, he deserted

The Russian Cavalry

("When they sent me to Minsk

I went to Pinsk") and embarked

Before they could hang him for treason,

I knew him

Mostly in his old age

when he sang Yiddish songs

about marguerite  
and raisins

And his voice rang

from the bathroom tiles.

"Only in America," he would say,

"Can you buy tomorrow's paper today"

Forgetting



The apostatic neighbors

and the peddler's route

blissful

in his Flatbush apartment overlooking the Brooklyn College campus,  
Immigrants!

how quickly your chosen land

Grew to an empire

whose native sons and daughters, indistin-  
guishable,

Acquiesce in a society

Fixed

as in the days of the manor lord. Your island

Has become the pale

of a federal commission, Congress proposes

Its reclamation as a national shrine

Already

Uniformed guards

patrol its boundaries; radar

Scans the harbor; military jets

Hover over

Liberty

Isis

to the eternal immigrant

## AFTER LONG PASSION

touch moves  
the flesh  
still the smile  
is motionless

altar I approach  
as pilgrim  
then to monk  
along the road

our dancing took its own steps  
to promise a surpassing harvest  
blossoming so mad  
so blind

sleep's frosty hand  
will touch us  
catch us  
unawares

## NIGHTSONG

air sick to death with smoke  
moon gone choking to a hollow spark  
bulbs greased on trains  
with carcasses of insects

I was all face/all fire  
burning eyes and tongue like snake  
moribund before desire spoke  
so all you heard was sand



## PADMA-SAMBHAVA HAD TWENTY FIVE DISCIPLES \*

(found poem)

Nam-k'a nin-po mounted the sunbeams.  
 San-gye-ye-se drove iron bolts into rocks.  
 Gyal-ch'og-yan changed his head into a horse's and neighed thrice.  
 K'ar-ch'en Ch'o-gyal revived the slain.  
 Pal-ki-ye-se overcame three fiendesses.  
 Pal-ki-Sen-ge enslaved demons, nymphs, and genii.  
 Vairecana obtained the five heavenly eyes of knowledge.  
 Nah-dag-gyalpo attained Samadhi.  
 Yu-drun-Nin-po acquired divine knowledge.  
 Jnana-kumara worked miracles.  
 Dorje-Dun Jem travelled invisibly as the wind.  
 Yo-se-Nan visited the fairy world.  
 Sog-pu-Lha-pal (a mongol) ensnared ferocious beasts.  
 Na-nam-yese soared in the sky.  
 Pal-ki-Nan-p'yug killed his enemies by signs.  
 Den-ma-tse-Wan had perfect memory.  
 Ka-Wa-pal-tseg perceived the thoughts of others.  
 Shu-bu-pal-sen made water run upwards.  
 Khe-hu-c'ug-lo caught flying birds.  
 Gyal-Wai-Lodei raised ghosts and converted the corpse into gold.  
 Ten-pai-nam-k'a tamed wild yaks of the northern desert.  
 'Odan-Wan-p'yug dived into water like a fish.  
 Na-'og rin-ch'en crushed adamant to powder and ate it like meal.  
 Pal-kyi Dor-je passed through rocks and mountains.  
 Lan-dod Kon-ch'og wielded and repelled thunderbolts.  
 And a twenty-sixth is added:  
 Gyai-wai-Ch'an o'ub sat cross-legged in the air.

\* "each of whom is credited with magical powers, mostly of a grotesque character. And these disciples he instructed in the way of making magic circles for coercing the demons and for exorcism," The Buddhism of Tibet, 2nd ed., London, 1934, by L. Austine Waddell, pp. 31-2.

## THE SADNESS OF WORDS IS TERRIBLE IN ITS BURDEN

The sadness of words is terrible in its burden.  
It is like the weight of a stone on my back.  
It is the weight of a life that moves in my hand;  
my fingers must care for it, must heed its desires.  
The sadness of words is sad, It is a burden of terror,  
terror to bear the sadness of words.

In my hand grows a sadness in its soil,  
In the toil of a hand a word worships and waits,  
till tears water the sadness of the words,  
till the body breaks and waters the words,  
till the head bows and worships the words,  
till a sadness saddens the terrible words,  
till a terrible burden of sadness is lifted  
and the weight of a stone grown like a flower  
flies in this sadness to sooth this bent back.

KA

for Zeno

Ka. I am the voice of dogs barking.  
Ka. I am the sounds of love meeting.  
Ka. I am the taste of tears falling.  
Ka. I am the pain of desire fading.  
Ka. I am the sun and the moon.  
Ka. I am the skies and stars.  
Ka. I am Ka, the sound of sound.

## AB LA DOLCHOR

"Quantum lenta solent inter viburna cupressi."

-Vergil: Eclogue 1

"Quemadmodum desiderat cervus ad fontes aquarum."

-Psalm 42

"Ab la dolchor del temps novel."

-Guillaume IX

As the Cypress leans over the Weeping Willow,  
Not once thinking of laughter or grief,  
Of rain or of the dream of rain,  
The Forest of Strangers returning to sleep;  
So I lay among women by olive groves;  
The moon cast their shadows on the sand  
As the waves rolled in against the shore;  
Ab la dolchor, and in the sweetness of the new time.

As the Hart thirsts after the Fountains of Water,  
Not once thinking of body or mind,  
Of pain or of the dream of pain,  
The shaft of the Huntsman being lodged in his side;  
So my heart thirsted after Thee, O Lord;  
Calm was the day, and through the trembling air  
The wind in the willows was sweet with Thy word;  
Ab la dolchor, and in the sweetness of the new time.

As the Nightingale sings to the Forest of Strangers,  
Not once thinking of pity or fear,  
Of fame or of the dream of fame,  
The sonnet traversing the tides of the years;  
So I sang from a chamber of the solitary tower:  
The exploits of heroes are sung in provencal,  
The Red-Cross Knight, who is he? George;  
Ab la dolchor, and in the sweetness of the new time.

As the Phoenix goes forth as a song from the pyre,  
Not once thinking of darkness or light,  
Of shame ~~or of the dream~~ of shame,  
The prayers of the body consuming the night;  
So my songs went ~~forth~~ after Thee, O Lord;  
The moon pulled my shadow into the world,  
As the word was made flesh, so the flesh was made word;  
Ab la dolchor, and in the sweetness of the new time.

A Review of COLLECTING EVIDENCE by Hugh Seidman,  
Yale Younger Series of Poets, 1970.

That Stanley Kunitz, in his introduction to Hugh Seidman's first book, makes a great deal out of the poet's earlier training in physics and mathematics, somehow nearly cheapens the poems inside by trying to sell us a renaissance man as opposed to a new voice in our poetry. Hugh Seidman's book stands high on any list of "younger poets", and no one who has given the matter much thought can deny the similarity of reducing a secret about the physical universe into an equation and the same kind of pruning that goes <sup>into</sup> making a poem. For all his "advanced training," Seidman's topics are usually what might be called the "ill-logic of the interpersonal." That is to say, he shares a great many preoccupations with other poets in New York: the difficulty of urban existence that culminates in a deadly introversion; the difficulty implicit in having a close relationship of any kind; the paranoia that is almost taken for granted. And Seidman writes of these difficulties with a method of poetic creation (and exorcism) that aims at an incredibly accurate definition within the boundaries of as few words as possible. This is accomplished because his poetic voice is very assured of its own ability to carry, and seems to act as a filter between worlds, only letting in that which is capable of being so accurately rendered. So Seidman's field is a limited one to start with: if he goes so far as to write of a beginning somewhere in the poem, its end must be implicit. In "The Lucencies of Last Spring," with its spritely Wallace Stevens title, we are granted not memory in its duality, but only negativity. "The Studio" is the only poem in the book which leads at all to anything pleasant, and they are only the pleasantries of the artist creating nature while the poet creates a relationship out of "earth", "fear", "glycerine", "concrete" etc. There is an indoor feeling to Seidman's work, and we can almost hear him gasping in the heavy, used-up air as he puts his third person protagonist into another affair in an even stuffier room where we can watch love sour and spread insidiously to externals. Seidman's great strength is the efficiency of his creative intuition--his weakness (which he is managing to overcome, it seems, on the basis of his more recent work) is that the evidence is being collected for a statement of outcome which is outside the book's frame of reference. The book's title betrays it--evidence for what? we are left asking.

As a maker of verse, Seidman has used his sources well. Williams is certainly there somewhere, too well-hidden to be outright, but so much there that we miss his power of observation and reduction to a level not so far below the original's. The lexicographer's learned monotone is not so staid that a colloquialism is out of place. The shape of the poems on paper, which form arbitrary but deliberate structures of two, three, and four

lines, show the struggle between free verse and an organic formality that is at the heart of several Black Mountain poets. Seidman's ability to work on a scale in which the cumulative effect is greater than the sum of the parts is learned (although very indirectly--Seidman is far more laconic and private) from the vibrant personality created when Allen Ginsberg reads his work. But Seidman's voice is softer and his alone. It has evolved from itself very carefully so that its knowledge of its capabilities lets it be fluent whenever fluency is called for. On the other hand, such fluency can serve as something to fall back on for lack of anything real to say. However durable a concept of line is, and Seidman's is beautifully intuitive and durable, it cannot cover poetic speech in rhetorical dress from appearing exactly the way it is. Falling back on one's own tricks is generally one of the poet's favorite tricks, but it spites the poem by showing a line or tercet to be empty of feeling, however fine it might sound. It also keeps a poet on his own ground, when the act of writing poetry should be an explorative if not necessarily affirmative act.

The most important figures of form that these poems take seem dictated by the moment of composition, but Seidman uses his invented structures uniformly within the poem as a kind of framing and ordering device. Each line break is sensible and should be read with a slight pause. The line breaks, which make reading the verse as the poet prefers it easier to do, also allow for some rhetorical variations in resonance, spacing, repetition, indenting and dropping of words. In many poems there is lack of all punctuation but the period, and yet their absence is hardly noticed.

Thematically, the poems deal with relations in general--delicate and complex emotions reacting with others and described in a way which is cool and detached (and for Seidman, the cooler the tone the greater the heat of the subject matter). "The Pillar", for example, becomes a metaphor for a mutually destructive relationship in which the pillar itself is the bait used to carry along an affair that had long since ceased to be beneficial: "yet the pillar stood/thru all humiliation and mischance,/ the core against disturbance/that was itself disturbance/in its fixity and need to be." Seidman also fails when he does not use his inverse ratio well and takes on the burden of his own feelings. Then he starts feeling sorry for himself at the expense of precision. This is the one glaring flaw with "The Modes of Vallejo Street" which is the longest and most representative poem in the book. Its intensity is almost always at the point where Seidman is detached enough to break it down into small verbal units. When the pain is so great he must shout about it, it is annoying. If a man wants to scream, let him. If he wants to write a poem, also let him. If he wants a poem to scream, let him try to make it scream. But never say when the scream is coming because you will not be screaming. And truth, par-



ticularly the truth of his own definitions, is what Seidman is trying to find on a grim journey up the west coast, through memory, and back to New York, which is dismal but familiar enough to allow for recuperation. In the poem, the attitude of the poet is almost hallucinogenic bereavement; he tortures himself scrupulously until he re-arrives in New York where he has been alone before. And that is the resolution--that he can tell someone he has loved "be what you are or die." It is hardly an alternative on the physical level, and presupposes grim time for his lover. Beyond that, we are told nothing, and the silence resounds with limitation (and of course, possibility). Seidman is not a fatuous poet (nor even one of explanations on any level), so to tell more would betray the poem's intent which only goes so far as to apply a linguistic construct for an emotional complex. The constructs are evidence, very well collected. But the evidence cries for poetic equations to emerge to tell us why, as opposed to how, life is so difficult--in other words, the answer sought by all poets, arrived at only by accident.

--David Levine

"The Noble Finger:" A Review of NERVES by John Wieners,  
Cape Goliard, 1970.

Nerves contains much fallow, fertile material. Unlike The Hotel Wentley Poems, with its concentrated, externalized, high-pitched plaints, Nerves curls inward & lets its elements lie discretely. It is more of a "shy insistence from a distance" ("Feminine Soliloquy").

Weird equations of language appear: "Two splits of casino libation husband/retrieve one midnight Essex" ("W W")-- & at first seem like pure batty bop language. But the lines & stanzas are so measured that the equation seems inevitable, a conclusion latent in the measure. Such lines as the above, played so deadpanned & in such formal context, are not, simply, "incomprehensible." At least a part of it is grasped, & firmly so, through the stresses on the ear-mind; & tone comes through audibly; so that the "meaning" hangs out, partially exposed, graspable (by what faculty?) but not yet grasped.

The measure is completely trusted; the rhyme, batty as it seems, will carry the right meaning. It might seem to be a gamble, the line of meaning tossed too far from word to rhyming word. It is almost never a gamble, for so much is invested in the measure, the line of meaning is so intact, that something has to be pulled in. Complete submission (actually a submission by Wieners to his own resources, totally) to enshackling & darkly brutal power is valued because it is intimate, proximate &

trusting: "yearning to be caught, held, and/told in crushes' obedient trust" ("To Do").

This is no such thing as an abdication of freedom. "Freedom" is too abstract for Wieners' measure: it can't be physically grasped, crushed, sucked. There is really no external authority in these poems at all. Further, the self here is totally on its own, enduring the "hurts of wanting the impossible/through this suspended vacuum" (Supplication"). The "you", the other, is impossibly distant. The pain rendered by a brutal master is at least physically intimate, & is the most obvious gesture of an other presence--preferable to the "suspended vacuum."

This presence hovers as a dream, the wish of the poems. In "How To Cope With This", the memory of "A mean, dark man/was my lover/in a mean, dark room/for an evening" is strictly past-tense, deep in the past & far away; the memory, though (as memory) has a powerful physical presence: "even yet, I fear his foot/feel his cock and know it/as my own,"--the self gains power from even a memory of physical proximity. The presence has become "my hope/and only scope."

This is quite different from, say, what happens in "A Poem For Painters" (in The Hotel Wentley Poems), where an other is proximate enough to be painting the poet as he writes his poem & the measure extends far enough outside itself to take the painter into its own action. "Our age bereft of nobility/How can our faces show it?" Wieners asks, in the presence of the painter. In Nerves, he trusts the face (his measure & own resources) to show it. "Nobility" is just power, right order, external to the self now, of the age. Nobility has become "a mean dark man," closer to the self, more in isolation. By reaching deep into his own resources, & committing himself devoutly to them, he gives the world outside of the self the finger. The noble finger.

--David Katz

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

David Katz edits Endymion magazine with Linda Stern. He was recently a co-recipient of the Goodman prize with Karen Slotnick.

Robert Kroetsch's most recent novel is The Stud Horse Man, published by Simon & Schuster. His poems have appeared in various magazines both in Canada and the U.S. He teaches English at SUNY-Binghamton where he is an editor of Boundaries 2.

Charles Kutcher is a doctoral candidate at the U. of Pa. He is preparing a manuscript of poems under the title Acoustic Illusions.

David Levine was the recipient of the DeJur award while at City College. A manuscript of poems is in preparation.

Stanley Nelson's most recent book of poems is The Brooklyn Book of The Dead, published by Harry Smith. His plays have been presented in off-Broadway productions. He edits Gnosis.

Toby Olson has recently completed a novel, The Life of Jesus, from which a portion is excerpted in these pages. His latest book of poems is Vectors published by Albatross.

Donald Phelps is the editor of For Now. His essays on the comics have appeared in a number of magazines, most recently in the latest issue of Prose. Recently, he has been at work on a number of projects: a monograph on Paul Goodman; a novel, The Wringer; and a series of pieces on astrology, some of which will appear in the next issue of The Mysterious Barricades.

Shirley Powell recently gave a reading at Doctor Generosity's. This is her first publication.

Edward Sarmiento taught for many years in universities in England and the States. He and his wife have just retired to England, where he will devote his time solely to poetry. A recent poem of his was selected by the Borestone Mountain Committee after having appeared in Spirit. In April he gave a poetry reading at Harpur College with Henry Weinfield.

Karen Slotnick has had poems in Promethean as well as other magazines.

Brad Stark is the publisher of the Half-Ass Press. He is preparing a manuscript of poems entitled Smoke Signals.

David Wolinsky recently read at Doctor Generosity's. His poems have appeared in Promethean.

Henry Weinfield is the editor of The Mysterious Barricades. The Carnival Cantata appeared in 1971.

Mark Weiss is taking a doctorate in English. His poems have appeared in First Issue among other places.

On April 27th a poetry reading was held for the benefit of The Mysterious Barricades in the gallery of the Gotham Book Mart. The editor would like to express his gratitude to Andreas Brown of the Gotham, to the poets who participated, and to the responsive and generous audience that attended.

